



Nathan Deal
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State Senate Approves DECAL's National Background Check Bill

HB 350 receives final passage

New Law would require National Fingerprint-Based Background Checks for All Employees of Georgia's 6,000 child care facilities protecting the health and safety of Georgia's Youngest Learners

ATLANTA, Ga., (March 20, 2013) – The Georgia State Senate Wednesday overwhelmingly passed a bill requiring all employees of Georgia's 6,000 child care facilities to undergo national fingerprint-based background checks.

HB 350 would require all employees in a child care program to have satisfactory national background checks based on fingerprints, not just a name search of Georgia records. By requiring only a state background check on employees, today it is possible for people with criminal backgrounds in other states to be cleared to work in Georgia child care programs.

The bill is sponsored by State Representative Alan Peake (R-Macon) and backed by Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. "This is a critical measure to improve child safety, not only in my district, but throughout all of Georgia," said Rep. Peake. "We are excited to achieve final passage today."

"This bill is vitally important to the safety of Georgia's most vulnerable and precious population," said Sen. Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), who carried the bill in the Senate. "This bill is family friendly, minimizes the impact on small business, and improves child safety."

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HB 350 was supported in testimony by the Georgia Child Care Association (GCCA), VOICES for Georgia's Children, Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), and the Interfaith Children's Movement. It is also supported by Quality Care for Children.

“Having full and reliable information about the criminal histories of employees in child care facilities is essential to assuring safety for Georgia's youngest learners,” said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. “Collaboration between the Department of Early Care and Learning, the Georgia Child Care Association, and numerous other advocacy organizations yielded a bill that is good for children and families and enjoyed broad support. I commend Rep. Peake and Senator Miller for sponsoring the legislation and the General Assembly for overwhelmingly supporting the measure.”

“This bill is a great step forward for child safety in Georgia,” said Ray Higgins, Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Finance for DECAL. “We greatly appreciate the work of Rep. Peake and Senator Miller and thank the Legislature for their support.”

Higgins said also on DECAL's 2013 legislative agenda is supporting Governor Nathan Deal's efforts to restore a full 180-day calendar for Georgia's Pre-K Program and the passage of HB 354, which primarily clarifies definitions regarding child care programs.

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.decal.ga.gov.